

The Date of Priscian's *De laude Anastasii*

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THE PURPOSE of this paper is to date a largely neglected source for (as I shall argue) the early part of the reign of Anastasius, a *Vorarbeit* to a projected new edition of Priscian's poem.

The year is A.D. 512, according to S. L. Endlicher,¹ its first editor, and, more recently, E. Stein.² But apart from line 299, on which Endlicher and Stein rested their case, nothing (it seems) points to a date later than 503. So we may begin by looking rather carefully at line 299. Lines 299–300 describe the '*fortissima facta*' of Anastasius' nephew Hypatius,

*qui Scythicas gentes ripis depellit ab Histri,
quem vidit validum Parthus sensitque timendum.*

Line 300 clearly refers to Hypatius' (brief) rôle in the Persian war of 503; and 299, according to Endlicher and Stein, to his activity in Thrace *ca* 512. To this interpretation of 299 there are a number of objections.

First (and least serious), it would be surprising, and unnecessarily perverse, if Priscian had so reversed the order of events in consecutive lines, even in a panegyric. More important, it is by no means certain that the Hypatius who was *magister militum per Thracias* in 513 is to be identified with Hypatius the nephew of Anastasius, nor is there any evidence that this Hypatius fought any 'Scythian races' during his command in any case.

All that we know about Hypatius the *magister militum* in Thrace is that he became unpopular with his troops and that in 513 the crafty Vitalian, then *comes foederatorum* in Thrace, exploited this discontent, seducing away or assassinating a number of his senior officers. The emperor replaced Hypatius with the more experienced Cyril, but Vitalian soon had him assassinated too. Cyril was then replaced by someone called Alathar, but overall command of the army now sent

¹ *Prisciani Grammatici de laude imperatoris Anastasii et de ponderibus et mensuris carmina* (Vienna 1828) 75; cf. Schanz-Hosius-Krüger, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur* IV. 2 (München 1920) 237.

² *Histoire du Bas Empire* II (Paris 1949) 132 n.1, 178 n.2 [hereafter, STEIN].

against Vitalian was assigned to Hypatius, this time unquestionably the nephew of Anastasius. On considerations of probability alone it seems incredible that a general who had both lost the confidence of his men and been outwitted by the enemy should be reappointed so soon to an enlarged command against the same enemy. Furthermore, our only narrative of these events, that of John of Antioch,³ gives every appearance of distinguishing between *two* Hypatii. First he refers to just 'Hypatius the *magister militum*' (τοῦ τὴν στρατηγίαν ἔχωντος), then to Anastasius' appointment of 'Hypatius his own nephew' (τὸν ἀδελφιδοῦν τὸν ἑαυτοῦ). J. B. Bury⁴ and A. H. M. Jones⁵ distinguished between the two, and (*pace* Stein,⁶ P. Peeters⁷ and now C. Capizzi⁸) we must surely follow them.

There is, in any event, no mention of any barbarian invasion of this area in the period immediately before 513 to justify Priscian's *ripis depellit ab Histri*, nor does the sorry record of Hypatius the *magister militum* make any such success very likely. On the other hand, there were a number of serious Bulgar invasions of Thrace in the period immediately before 503. Julian, *magister militum per Illyricum*, was killed in battle with them in 493, and in 499 Aristus, *magister militum per Illyricum*, was defeated heavily, losing 4000 out of 15000 men. In 502 the Bulgars ravaged Thrace unopposed. It was to meet this danger that Anastasius built, or rather rebuilt, the famous Long Walls *ca* 497.⁹ After 502 there were no further invasions of the Balkans for 15 years. Rather than invent an invasion *ca* 512 for the wrong Hypatius, it would be sounder method to infer that Hypatius the nephew of Anastasius distinguished himself in one of the wave of invasions between 493 and 502.¹⁰ With news from the Danube front so consistently gloomy during these years, even a modest success

³ Fr.103, *Excerpta de Insidiis*, ed. C. de Boor (Berlin 1905) pp.143ff (=fr.214e in Müller, *FHG* V).

⁴ *History of the Later Roman Empire I*³ (London 1923) 448–49.

⁵ *The Later Roman Empire I* (Norman 1964) 234.

⁶ Stein 178 n.2.

⁷ "Jacques de Saroug appartient-il à la secte monophysite?" *AnalBoll* 66 (1948) 167–68.

⁸ *L'imperatore Anastasio I* (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 184, Rome 1969) 124 [hereafter, *CAPIZZI*].

⁹ For sources see Stein II 89, and Capizzi 202–04; for the substantial and largely unexplored remains see R. M. Harrison, "The Long Wall in Thrace," *Archaeologia Aeliana* 47 (1969) 33f.

¹⁰ The defeat of 'Pumpeius', presumably Hypatius' brother Pompeius, at Adrianople (recorded by Jordanes, *Romana* 356, p.46.13 Mommsen) perhaps falls in this period too, though Stein (p.106) and Capizzi (p.172) place it in or after 517.

against the terrible Bulgars would have merited Priscian's praise. Such a success might also be brought into connection with Hypatius' otherwise unheralded consulship in 500. I would suggest then that, regardless of whether or not he is to be identified with the man who held the same post in 512/3, we insert the name of Hypatius, the nephew of Anastasius, among the *magistri militum per Thracias ca* (perhaps just before) 500.

All in all, it hardly seems that line 299 offers any firm grounds for dating the poem after 503. The reason for not going beyond 503 is that, contrary to what Priscian alleges, Hypatius disgraced rather than distinguished himself against the Persians in that year. Panegyrist exaggerate, of course; but if Priscian knew when he wrote that Hypatius had been relieved of his command for failing to cooperate with the commander-in-chief Areobindus,¹¹ he would have done much better to say nothing at all. Anyone writing *ca* 512, when Hypatius had had both the time and the opportunity to redeem himself,¹² could easily have found both truer and more tactful things to say about him. But Priscian was writing *in* 503,¹³ when it was known only that the emperor's nephew, fresh from his triumphs on the Danube frontier, was leading an army against the Persians in a campaign that had begun well (*cf.* lines 259–60).

The greater part of the rest of the poem, nearly half (lines 15–139), is devoted to the final defeat of the Isaurians in 498 and Anastasius' (allegedly) generous treatment of the defeated.¹⁴ It seems natural to assume that this was written not long after these events, when the Isaurian danger was still relatively fresh in people's minds, not fifteen years after.

Lines 218f praise Anastasius for banishing 'seditio', evidently circus riots, from Constantinople. As I have recently pointed out elsewhere, there was a regular wave of such riots between 491 and 501, and then (with one exception in 507) nothing more till 514.¹⁵ One of the ways Anastasius coped with the problem was to ban *venationes* (*cf.* lines 223f) in 497 and the pantomime in 502. Thereafter he pursued a more

¹¹ Procopius specifically mentions his dismissal, *De bello Persico* 1.12.39; in general, Stein 92f.

¹² For Hypatius' career see A. H. M. Jones, *PLRE s.v.*, forthcoming.

¹³ As tentatively suggested by Bury, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.4) II³ 12 n.2 (with no comment on line 299).

¹⁴ For the facts see Stein 84.

¹⁵ A. Cameron, *Porphyrius the Charioteer* (Oxford 1973) 233f.

conciliatory policy toward the factions of the circus, manifested in a remarkable series of statues to the charioteer Porphyrius. For a few years at least relative peace reigned in the hippodrome.¹⁶ It would therefore be natural for someone writing in 503 to claim *per te seditio penitus deletur ab urbe*.

On the other hand, it would be strange for Priscian to have evoked Anastasius' ban on *venationes* so enthusiastically much later than this, since they seem to have crept back after a few years (represented, for example, on the consular diptychs of Areobindus in 506).¹⁷ It would also be surprising to find so detailed an account of the abolition of the *collatio lustralis* in 498 (lines 149–70) as late as 513.

Lines 184f refer to the repair of city walls and harbours. Endlicher saw here references to building works in 507, and one might indeed, in a Constantinopolitan context, be tempted to think of the excavation of the harbour of Julian in 509.¹⁸ But §§19 and 21 of Procopius of Gaza's *Panegyricus Anastasii*, probably written in or soon after 501,¹⁹ has quite enough on the repair of harbours and the like to justify what Priscian says. Line 184 itself, *prostratas recreasti funditus urbes*, points to earthquakes. Now it so happens that a series of earthquakes all over the eastern provinces is recorded between 494 and 503—after when, nothing more till 515.²⁰ Once again, 503 seems to fit the composition of Priscian's poem most aptly.

Any later than this one would have expected less on the Isaurian victory and far more on the Persian war, drawn to a not unsuccessful conclusion in 507. The poet Colluthus wrote an epic on it (*Περσικά*), just as his fellow Egyptian Christodorus had done for the Isaurian war in his *Ἰσαυρικά*.²¹ One might at least have expected a brief account of the recovery of Amida or the fortification of Daras, not to mention sundry other more recent achievements of Anastasius.

I suggest, therefore, that Priscian composed his panegyric some time in 503.

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¹⁶ For all the details see my *Porphyrius*, 223–52.

¹⁷ *Porphyrius* (*supra* n.15) 228–29.

¹⁸ R. Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*² (Paris 1964) 231; cf. Capizzi 200.

¹⁹ As established by C. Kempen, *Procopii Gazaei in imperatorem Anastasium panegyricus* (Diss. Bonn 1918) xxii–v.

²⁰ Stein II 193 n.1; Capizzi 193–94.

²¹ *Suda s.v. Κόλουθος* and *Χριστόδωρος*.